

LITTLE STONY CREEK

Boundary Description

Little Stony Creek in Giles County from the first footbridge above the Cascades picnic area, upstream to the 3,300-foot elevation for a total distance of approximately 8 miles.

Observations

On October 25, 2002, a site visit to various points along the nominated segment of Little Stony Creek in Giles County was conducted as required by DEQ Exceptional Waters guidance. The US Forest Service provides a maintained trail from the parking area up to the Cascades and observations were made from approximately one-quarter mile below the most downstream boundary of the nominated segment up to the Cascades waterfall for a total distance of approximately two miles observed.



Footbridge at downstream boundary of nominated section

The majority of the substrate within the segment of Little Stony Creek that was observed is boulder and large cobble. One of the dominant features of the stream is the continuous repetition of falls and plunge pools. This feature, in addition to the heavy tree canopy, provides for well-oxygenated water that is one factor that contributes to the outstanding native brook trout population that inhabits the stream. Two adult brook trout in full breeding color were caught and released and at least fifteen others in various size classes were observed.



Plunge pool



Male brook trout
with spawning colors

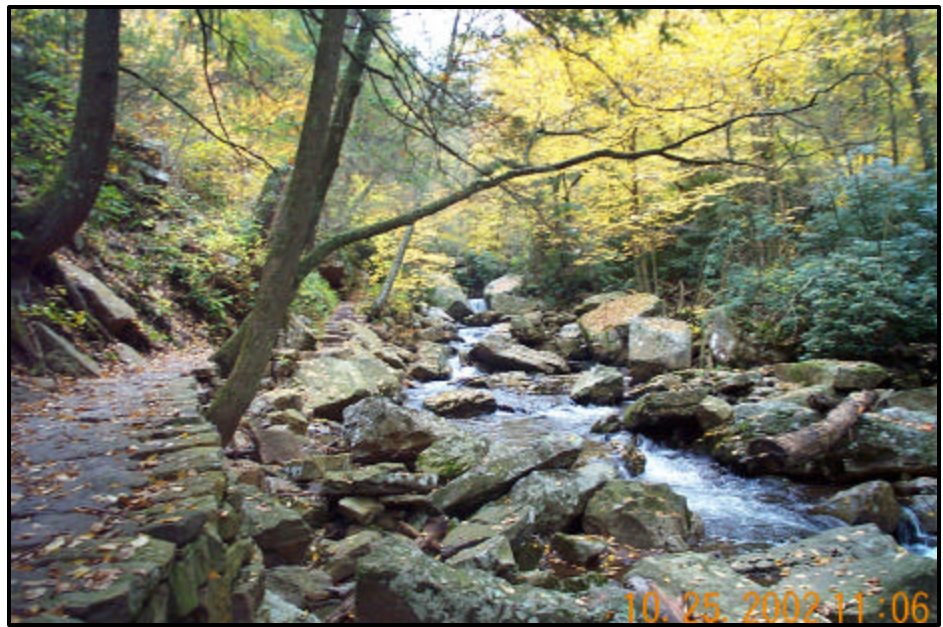


The robust condition of the spawning trout and the distribution of size/year classes that were observed suggest a healthy, self-sustaining population, which is indicative of near pristine conditions.

A cursory benthic survey was done at several points and numerous individuals of the families ephemeroptera (mayflies), plecoptera (stoneflies), and trichoptera (caddisflies) were seen as were crayfish and, occasionally, snails.

A trail constructed and maintained by the US Forest Service follows the stream from the parking area up to the Cascades and, while technically a modification to the natural setting does not detract from it. Native stone was utilized to construct numerous steps and walkways that assist in traversing steep or dangerous areas.

As evidenced by the number of hikers passed on the return down the trail (at least ten), the Cascades trail is extremely popular for hiking. At the end of the streamside trail is the truly exceptional sight of the Cascades waterfall and its accompanying plunge pool.



Conclusions

The environmental setting of the nominated segment of Little Stony Creek is, without a doubt, of exceptional quality. The native brook trout population within the stream is indicative of an exceptional aquatic community as well as providing for outstanding recreational opportunities. Even if the trout were not present, the hike up to the Cascades and accompanying scenery are exemplary recreational opportunities. After considering observations made during a visit to the site, staff has concluded that Little Stony Creek satisfies all three of the eligibility criteria to be considered for designation as Exceptional Waters.



The Cascades



View from the top of
the Cascades.